

# Asterix - Humour

:This article refers to the French Asterix character . For other uses, see [Asterisk \(disambiguation\)](#).

## Stereotypes and allusions

Everywhere they visit, Asterix and Obelix encounter people and things borrowed and caricatured from 20th century real life. In the early album *Asterix and the **Goths***, for instance, the **Goths** are represented as **militaristic** and regimented, reminiscent of late nineteenth and early twentieth century **Germans**. The helmets worn by these **Goths** even resemble the German **Pickelhaube** helmets worn up to **World War I** and one of their leaders bears an uncanny resemblance to **Otto von Bismarck**. The **British** are shown as polite and phlegmatic, drinking warm **beer** or hot **water** (before the first **tea** has been brought to what would become **England** by Asterix); they boil all their food and serve it with mint sauce. **Spain** is the cheap country down south where people from the **North vacation** (and demand to eat the same food as they are used to at home).

### Related Topics:

[Goths](#) - [Militaristic](#) - [Germans](#) - [Pickelhaube](#) - [World War I](#) - [Otto von Bismarck](#) - [British](#) - [Beer](#) - [Water](#) - [Tea](#) - [England](#) - [Spain](#) - [North](#) - [Vacation](#)

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Some caricatures of the traits of certain French regions are also used: the people from **Normandy** smother their food in cream and cannot give a straight answer; the people from **Marseille** play **boules** and exaggerate matters, and **Corsicans** don't like to do any work, are easily angered and have long-standing **vendettas** that they settle violently, and make cheese that smells so bad that it actually becomes an explosive.

### Related Topics:

[Normandy](#) - [Marseille](#) - [Boules](#) - [Corsicans](#) - [Vendetta](#)

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Minor characters often resemble famous people or fictional characters, usually caricatures of existing French people of the same era, particularly from television and the spectacles. In *Obelix and Co.*, for example, the young Roman bureaucrat is a caricature of a young [Jacques Chirac](#). Those characters usually stick out visually, by not having the round, oversized noses otherwise typical of Uderzo's style.

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(*Obelix and Co.* also includes two Roman legionaries drawn to the likeness of **Stan Laurel** and **Oliver Hardy**.)

### Related Topics:

[Stan Laurel](#) - [Oliver Hardy](#)

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Other side characters allude to people related to the place Asterix is visiting. Notable examples include Britain's most famous bards in the story *Asterix in Britain*, who are four in number and look remarkably like **the Beatles**; a pair of Belgian warriors in *Asterix in Belgium* who resemble Thomson and Thompson of **Tintin**-fame, and both **Don Quixote** and **Sancho Panza** are depicted in *Asterix in Spain*. More recently, this spoofing has occasionally extended to major characters as well: in **Asterix and the Black Gold**, a Roman spy is a young **Sean Connery** named Dubbelosix drawn in **James Bond** style, and in *Asterix and Obelix All at Sea*, the leader of the escaped slaves (named Spartakis, being Greek) is based on **Kirk Douglas' Spartacus**.

#### Related Topics:

[The Beatles](#) - [Tintin](#) - [Don Quixote](#) - [Sancho Panza](#) - [Asterix and the Black Gold](#) - [Sean Connery](#) - [James Bond](#) - [Kirk Douglas](#) - [Spartacus](#)

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The stories also feature allusions to major artistic works (such as **Pieter Bruegel's Peasant Wedding** and **Victor Hugo's** story of the **Battle of Waterloo** from *Les Châtiments in Asterix in Belgium*), historical personalities (**Napoleon**, **Louis XIV of France**), famous places (Le **Moulin Rouge**)....

<http://www.mage.fst.uha.fr/asterix/allusion/allusion.html>

#### Related Topics:

[Pieter Bruegel](#) - [Peasant Wedding](#) - [Victor Hugo](#) - [Battle of Waterloo](#) - [Napoleon](#) - [Louis XIV of France](#) - [Moulin Rouge](#)

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However, in many other respects the series reflects life in the **1st century BC** fairly accurately for the medium. For example, the multi-storied apartments in **Rome**—the insulae—which have Obelix remarking that one man's roof is another man's floor and consequently "These Romans are crazy": his favourite line. This line itself is also an intrinsic joke on **Rome** and the romans: its **Italian** equivalent being "Sono pazzi questi romani" abbreviates as "**SPQR**", which is the motto of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, though, the presence of chimneys in the Gaullic huts is not accurate, as they used gabled openings in the roof to let smoke escape; and **menhirs** are now believed to have been erected long before the Gauls.

#### Related Topics:

[1st century BC](#) - [Rome](#) - [Italian](#) - [SPQR](#) - [Menhir](#)

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The text also makes relatively regular use of original **Latin proverbs** and **Latin phrases**, and allusions to **Julius Caesar's De Bello Gallico**, a book about the conquest of Gaul, later used as an introductory text to **Latin**. Some jokes are made about Caesar's use of the third person to write about himself. Such allusions were likely to be well-received by the better-educated sections of the French and Belgian public in the **1960s**, when the teaching of **Latin** was still widespread in high schools.

#### Related Topics:

[Latin proverbs](#) - [Latin phrases](#) - [Julius Caesar](#) - [De Bello Gallico](#) - [Latin](#) - [1960s](#)

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## Puns in names

A key feature of the text of the *Asterix* books are the constant **puns** used as names of characters; The names of the two protagonists come from **asterisk** and **obelisk**, Asterix being the star of the books (Latin *aster* (derived from the Greek word ????? (astir) and Celtic *rix*), and Obelix being a **menhir** delivery-man. This is a double **pun**, since as well as meaning a stone monolith, the word **obelisk** can also refer to the **typographical dagger** (†) that is often used to denote the second footnote on a page after an **asterisk** (\*) *has been used to reference the first. In fact, nearly all the Gaulish characters' names end in -ix*, probably a reference to the real-life Gaulish chieftain such as **Vercingetorix** (though in life only the names of Gaulish kings—and not even all of them—ended in *-ix*, and if they did it was always *-rix*). English language examples include the chief (**Vitalstatistix**), the druid (**Getafix**), the fishmonger (**Unhygienix**), an old man (**Geriatrix**) with a young wife. Roman characters' names end with *-us* as in Noxious Vapus and Crismusbonus. In the case of one Roman couple, (**Radius**) and (**Ulna**). Other nations have their own style of naming - Vikings use *-af* (*Bathyscaf*), Britons use *-ax* (*Hiphiphurax*, *Notax*, and the notable exception *Zebigbos*), Goths use *-ic* (*Tonnic*) and Spaniards use Spanish-sounding names such as Huevos Y Bacon (Eggs and Bacon). Most names stand as solitary **puns**, like **Getafix** or **Geriatrix**, and some play on each other, as in the example of a Roman guard talking through a closed door to another guard: "Open up, Sendervictorious! It's me, Happyandglorious!" This is a **pun** on the UK national anthem "God Save the Queen" and the lines "Send her victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us, God save the Queen".

### Related Topics:

[Pun](#) - [Asterisk](#) - [Obelisk](#) - [Sanskrit](#) - [Menhir](#) - [Typographical dagger](#) - [Vercingetorix](#) - [Vitalstatistix](#) - [Getafix](#) - [Unhygienix](#) - [Geriatrix](#) - [Radius](#) - [Ulna](#)

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Many of these puns reflect the French original, in which, for example, the Egyptian in *Astérix Légionnaire* is named *Courdeténis* (*court de tennis*, i.e. "tennis court") in French and Ptenisnet in English. But the translation of puns is difficult, and **Anthea Bell** and **Derek Hockridge** do a good job in the **English language** edition. For example, the translation of Ordralfabétix (referring to *ordre alphabétique*, "alphabetical order"), is *Unhygienix*, given that this character is a fishmonger infamous for his rotting product. The original *Panoramix*, which perhaps represents the druid who sees the whole picture, is named *Getafix* in the English version, as "get a fix" conveys the fact he makes potent potions. *Assurancetourix* (*assurance tous risques* or "comprehensive insurance"), the ear-offending **bard** of the village, becomes the apt *Cacofonix*. Another clever translation is that of *Idéfix*. An *idée fixe* is a "fixed idea", i.e. an obsession, a dogma. The translation, **Dogmatix**, manages to conserve the "fixed idea" meaning and also include the syllable *dog*—perfect, given that the character is a dog who has very strong views on the environment (he howls whenever he sees an uprooted tree). Note that the American version of the comic was done by a different translator, and tends to use different names. The word *asterix* is also commonly mis-used by **English language** speakers and writers in place of *asterisk*.

### Related Topics:

[Anthea Bell](#) - [Derek Hockridge](#) - [Bard](#) - [Dogmatix](#) - [English language](#)

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## Running gags

A number of running gags recur in various albums. One of these is that the bard Cacophonix wants to create a spontaneous song whenever Asterix and Obelix leave or come back for a grand journey, but is usually prevented from doing so by Fulliautomatix.

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Another running gag is a group of pirates that tend to get caught in the middle of conflict and have their ship sunk for a variety of reasons, such as a stray thrown menhir, though usually Asterix and Obelix boarding them. In one episode, they attack a ship carrying a Roman agent, who points at a random crew member and states he gave him a bagful of gold if he would not attack the agent. In the ensuing battle over the nonexistent bag of gold, the pirates sink their own ship. In another, tired of being sunk, they give up pirating completely and open a ship-themed restaurant. Asterix and Obelix arrive and the restaurant is soon smashed to pieces. Those pirates are caricatures of the characters of "Barbe Rouge, Le Démon des Caraïbes", a pirate series that was published at the same time in Pilote.

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## Revisionist explanations

In the albums, some historical facts are retold, and attributed to Asterix & Obelix.

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- In *Asterix and Cleopatra*, when visiting Egypt, Obelix scales the sphinx. He then falls down, grabs the sphinx's nose, but it breaks. Immediately all the souvenir-shops nearby tick off the noses of their souvenir-sphinxes.
- In *Asterix in Britain*, the Britons are used to drinking hot water with a drop of milk. Only when Asterix puts in tea-leaves, given by the druid, the habit becomes tea-drinking.
- In *Astérix in Spain*, Astérix ends up in a circus in front of a bull (not a lion, there). He evades the bull nicely, and gets an applause from the audience. A guest of the Roman general drops her red cape in the arena. When Asterix wants to hand it back, the bull reacts and is finished after some dancing moves of Asterix, giving us the first bullfight.
- In *The Banquet* (Le Tour de Gaule) Obelix travels around Gaul with a yellow knapsack on his back, as if wearing the yellow jersey in the modern Tour de France. Complete with a white square patch on the backside, where we can imagine the cyclist's number.
- In *Asterix in Switzerland*, Asterix manages to carry an unconscious Obelix through the Alps, by tying ropes around himself, Obelix, and their guides, creating a famous technique in mountain-climbing.
- In *Asterix in Belgium*, the chieftain of Asterix's Belgian hosts gains inspiration for patates frites and

mussels, Belgium's two most famous culinary ambassadors, from a vat of boiling oil prepared as a Roman weapon, and a damp wooden plank belonging to the pirates (potatoes, however, were unknown in Europe at the time).

- In *Asterix and Caesar's Gift*, cacophonix composes the protest anthem "We shall Overcome", which became the US civil rights movement song.
- In *Asterix in Spain* Unhygenix - the fishmonger agrees to take payment for his boat rental in menhirs, as he wants to develop land on Salisbury Plain -- which explains the mystery of Stonehenge.

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